

From the author 681. b. 1
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A C C O U N T

OF THE

BARBERINI VASE.

H. Wedgwood (Jr.)

A C C O U N T

OF THE

B A R B E R I N I,

N O W

P O R T L A N D, V A S E;

W I T H

THE VARIOUS EXPLICATIONS OF ITS
BAS RELIEFS THAT HAVE BEEN
GIVEN BY DIFFERENT AUTHORS.

Mr. Wedgwood is endeavouring to collect
all the accounts of the Barberini ^{now Portland} vase that have
hitherto been published. He takes the liberty of
submitting to his friends the present state of his
collection; and will be very thankful for any
further information they may be pleased to give
him, or any other books they may direct him to
in which this subject is mentioned; that the account
which he purposes to deliver with his copies of
the vase, may be as complete as possible.

ACCOUNT, &c.

THIS beautiful monument of ancient art was discovered in the neighbourhood of Rome, in the pontificate of Urban VIII. (Barberini,) who was advanced to the papal chair in 1623, and died in 1644.

A mount of earth, called *Monte del grano*, about three miles from the city, in the road to Frascati (*a*), at that time brought into cultivation, was perceived by the labourers, in digging, to have a large vault under it (*b*); which, on being opened, was found to be a sepulchral chamber, inclosing a sarcophagus of excellent workmanship, and, within this, the vase in question full of ashes.

There was no inscription, to give any light with respect to the person whose remains were deposited in the sepulchre. Foggini (*c*) observes, that the mausoleum, which may be presumed to have been originally erected upon it, was probably demolished during the incursions of the barbarians, who destroyed every thing that was either magnificent or delightful above ground in the country about Rome; and that the earth, of which the mount appeared to consist, (which some (*d*) suppose to have been brought thither on purpose to cover the sepulchre) might have proceeded from the ruins of the mausoleum, mouldered during the many ages in which that whole country remained desolate.

(*a*) Venuti, *Spiegazione de bassi relievi nell'urna sepolc. d'Alessandro Severo.* p. 1.

(*b*) Venuti, *ibid.*—Mus. Capitol. tom. iv. p. 1.

(*c*) Museo Capitolino.

(*d*) Bartoli, *Antichi Sepolc.*

The sarcophagus was placed in the museum of the Capitol, and is spoken of by Foggini as being there when he published the bas reliefs of that museum, in 1782. The vase was deposited in the library of the Barberini family, and continued for above a century one of the most admired pieces of that celebrated collection: it was generally distinguished by the name of the *Barberini vase*.

After the dispersion of this library, the vase was purchased at Rome by Mr. Byres, and from him by Sir William Hamilton, to whom this kingdom is indebted for so many others of the finest remains of antiquity. By Sir William it was disposed of to the late duchess of Portland, but with so much secrecy, at her grace's request, that she was never known, even by her own family, to be the possessor of it.

At the sale of her grace's very curious and valuable museum, in 1786, the vase was purchased by the present duke of Portland, for about a thousand guineas; and, from the zeal of its noble proprietor to promote the interests of the fine arts, I was immediately indulged, to the utmost of my wishes, with an opportunity of attempting to produce copies of it; his grace having been pleased, for that purpose, to entrust this inestimable jewel in my hands, for upwards of twelve months.

AS the workmanship of this vase has engaged the attention of the curious, and exercised the ingenuity of the greatest antiquaries in Europe, more perhaps than any other ancient monument of late discovery; I shall endeavour, with the kind assistance of my friends, to state, in the following pages, all the different accounts and explications of it which have hitherto been published; that they may all be seen together, in a small compass, without the trouble of procuring, and turning over, the many voluminous works in which they are contained.

I. *Description of the vase; its matter; and mode of formation of the bas reliefs.*

THE earliest account of this vase I have been able to meet with is in the Description of the *Ædes Barberinæ* by count Girolamo Tezi (a), which was published in the year 1642, in the life-time of pope Urban, and therefore not many years after the discovery of the vase.

After enumerating various objects that were to be seen in this magnificent collection, the author proceeds, "But the eye is particularly caught by a sepulchral urn, of a palm and a half;—of encaustic work, of a violet colour, most beautifully executed by the hand of the artist, and so transparent, that you would think it a native amethyst. Its mouth is neither narrow, nor very wide: it has two handles, and no cover: its capacity is about half a gallon; the belly oblong, encompassed with white figures, which are encaustic like the ground, and so beautiful, that you would affirm them to have been elaborated by the hand of a Phidias. It descends sweetly into a foot of turned-work as it were, on which it stands steady."

The next mention I find of it is in Miffon's travels (a), who, in answer to some enquiries made by his correspondent in England, says (in a letter dated from Rome, May 4, 1688) "I had already seen the fine antique vessel of agat you speak of, which is in the library Barberini; but

(a) *Aedes Barberinae*, a Comite Hieronymo Tetio descriptæ. p. 26.

(b) Miffon's *Voyage to Italy*, Lett. 29.

I went yesterday to take a more exact view of it, that I might be able to give you a more certain account, according to your desire. Mr. Bartoli, who has designed it very exactly, gave me a copy of his design, which I send you, [and of which a print is annexed in Miffon's book.] You may depend upon the exactness of the figure; for I compared it very carefully with the original, and could not discover any fault; so that an attentive view of the draught will easily decide your controversy; and consequently spare me the trouble of clearing your doubts, or explaining the difficulties you propose. [The print is, nevertheless, exceedingly faulty, more so than that published afterwards by Bartoli himself.] Only there is one thing very singular, and of great importance, which I must not forget to tell you, because it could not be expressed in the design. All the figures you see, which are in basso relievo, are perfectly white; whereas the ground and the mass of the vessel in general is black as jet. They pretend that this vessel (which is about ten inches high, and six in diameter in the widest part of it,) was found formed by nature, almost of the same figure as it is at present, with a thick crust, or rather white superficies (for the white part is as hard as the rest of the matter.) So that when this crust was cut into figures, and the pieces of the same that separate 'em taken away, they discovered the black substance which serves for a ground to the ornaments or white figures. The little camayeus are all wrought thus; but that so large a stone as this should be framed into the perfect form of a vessel by nature, with a white coat just ready for the sculptor's chizel, is something so singular and uncommon, that though I cannot positively deny it, I must confess I am not much inclined to believe it. For though my eyes could not discover any cheat either in the black or white substance; it cannot be concluded from thence that art has not assisted nature in some parts of it.

How-

However, 'tis certain that they affirm the contrary here."

The idea of its being a natural stone appears to have prevailed long, even among connoisseurs. Mr. Wright (*a*), in 1720, speaking of "the famous *vas Barberinum*," says that "at Rome they do aver that the black and white in the stone are both natural." He adds, however, that "Signor Ficaroni, upon frequent examination of it, is of a contrary opinion: for that the ancients had certainly the way of making artificial cameos, of which he shewed me several."

Breval (*b*), in 1738, calls it "the famous vase of chalcidony," but adds, "or composition rather, as seems most credible." He does not appear to have seen it himself; for on account of some disputes respecting the vast inheritance of the family, "neither the intaglios, cameos, nor medals, (he says) were accessible to strangers in my time."

Some even of those who have written professedly on antiquities, and given prints, and explications (which will be stated hereafter) of the bas reliefs on this vase, speak of it as a natural stone, without intimating any suspicion of its being otherwise. Bartoli calls it a *sardonix*, De le Chauffe an *agate*, and Montfaucon simply a precious stone.

THAT the matter of the vase is *falsitious*, is now well known, and acknowledged by all. Count Caylus (*c*), mentioning it incidentally, calls it *glass*; and Winckelman (*d*) speaks of it more particularly, as the highest of the

(*a*) Wright's Travels, p. 292.

(*b*) Breval's Remarks on several parts of Europe, vol. I. p. 38.

(*c*) Recueil d'Antiquit. tom. II. p. 302.

(*d*) Hist. de l'Art de l'Antiquité, trad. par Huber, liv. VI. chap. 8.

ancient works in that material. "The finest things (he says) in this kind [glass] were the vases decorated with figures in relief, sometimes clear, sometimes of divers colours on a dark ground, and of so perfect execution that they were hardly inferior to the fine vases of fardonyx. There is only a single one of these vases known that has been preserved entire, a rare piece, which was found in an urn falsely called the urn of Alexander Severus, and which contained the ashes of a dead person: it is of the height of a palm and a half, and is to be seen at this day (1768) among the curiosities of the Barberini palace. One may judge of the beauty of this glass vase from the mistake of writers, who have described it as a vase of true fardonyx."

VENUTI speaks of the vase as being a composition of paste; the ground black, with a white coat applied upon it; and the figures reduced to cameo by working or cutting the white coat down to the black ground. An anonymous writer, in a paper published in one of the daily prints (a) during the exhibition of the Portland museum previous to its sale, seems to reject that idea of the formation of the figures. "This urn (he says) is composed of glass of a deep amethystine hue, but of a quality so perishable that some of its internal parts are manifestly corroded. It has been supposed (he continues) that while it was forming, on its purple ground a stratum of white enamel had been superinduced, out of which, by a partial detrition, the beautiful figures we regard with so much wonder had been raised. But on a diligent inspection of them through a strong magnifier, it should seem they were first cast in moulds, and then united to their fond by the aid of fire; one of the two substances employed

(a) General Advertiser, April 26, 1786.

being of a more fusible nature than the other. As a confirmation of this remark, round the contour of every figure, the yielding glass has risen above the lower edge of the hard enamel which had been pressed into it. After these figures, however, had been fixed, they were certainly retouched, the marks of the tool being visible on the extremities of them all."

The writer adds, that " This vase has been broken at least into three pieces, and its original bottom was most certainly destroyed. The present supplemental one (which is connected with all above it by a cincture of enamel yellower than the rest, and serves to hold the fractured parts more firmly together) exhibits a proportion of a figure, which, though female, has been stiled an Harpocrates. It is on a much larger scale than any form on the circumference of the urn, and was evidently an *appliquée*, though antecedent to the publication of Bartoli, who has described it. This adscititious part is of materials similar to those of which the vase is composed, though of very different and inferior workmanship; and its edge appears rough, from being ground into a circular shape, that it might be accommodated to its present use. It is improbable, however, that any ornament was originally placed where it never could be seen, the vessel itself being designed to rest firmly on a level basis, which must have been rendered unsteady by the projection of any figure embossed on its outside."

WITH regard to the bottom, I shall in this place only observe, that it was antecedent to count Tezi's publication, as well as Bartoli's; and that I cannot discover the least reason to doubt of its having accompanied the vase in the sepulchre. But the opinion of this writer respecting the mode of forming the figures, which I find has been adopted by others, may require a more particular examination.

That

That figures made of glass of one colour may thus be united to a ground of another, in *flat* pieces, and not too large, is readily admitted; for in this case there is a plain back mould, to support the pressure, which is necessary to be given in order to produce the impression of the bas relief on the other side with sufficient sharpness, and fix it to the ground. But in a vessel like the present,—large,—hollow,—in a red heat, and therefore extremely unmanageable,—in a state so soft, that its form would be altered by the smallest force, and even by its own weight,—without any support on the inside to bear against the pressure necessary for fixing the figures on the outside,—such an operation appears to me utterly impracticable.

Nor is the difficulty less with respect to the figures themselves; for as they could not be applied in separate moulds, for the reasons above given and many others, so neither could they be fixed separately after being first formed in moulds. They could not be so fixed, without being made red hot, and sufficiently soft not only to apply to, but incorporate with, the surface of the vase; and a bare inspection of these large and thin bas reliefs will shew the impossibility of suspending such figures by any means, in that hot and soft state, in order to their application on the vase, without their running out of drawing, and becoming a misshapen mass, very different indeed from what we see them in this beautiful piece of work.

With regard to what this writer says, of one of the two glasses being of a more fusible nature than the other, he certainly cannot have ascertained that fact by any experiments on the glasses themselves. If they had really that dissimilarity in their nature which he supposes, they would, in consequence of it, expand and contract so unequally by heat and cold, that one or other of them must have cracked: the bas reliefs being, on account of their figure, so much weaker than the ground, would inevitably have been torn in pieces.

white would have interfered too much with the outline of his figure, (that being white also) and rendered it much less conspicuous; he has therefore taken all the white away where it was liable to that objection, and cut the pillar entirely out of the blue ground.

A similar instance, of the blue ground being cut into, in order to give a higher relief to the white part, occurs in some beautiful fragments of the same species of work in Mr. Townley's collection. In one instance, the white having been accidentally chipped off from the blue ground, it appears evidently that the blue ground had formed a part of the bas relief.

I am at a loss to conceive, on what part of the vase the writer above mentioned grounds his opinion that the body is of a more perishable nature than the white figures upon it; for such I suppose to be his meaning, by mentioning the manifest corrosion of one, without saying any thing of the other. The figures on one side of the vase are in very fine preservation, and seem to have suffered little or nothing from time; those on the other side are considerably corroded; and the blue ground is, at least, equal in preservation to the white in every part of the vase: so that the differences have most probably arisen from some circumstances in the situation of the vase, either while it was in the sarcophagus, or at some other time, for it can hardly be supposed that the glass on one side was different in composition from that on the other.

Another opinion of the formation of these bas reliefs has been suggested; that though the body of the vase be glass, the figures are made of a porcelain composition, which was formed in moulds while in a soft clayie state, then applied on the glass, and baked and cemented to it by fire. But those who have had any experience of the strong fire which the baking of porcelain requires, and the comparatively inconsiderable one in which glass becomes soft so as to bend and alter its form, will perceive at once the impossibility

fibility of any clayie or porcelain composition being baked upon a vessel of glafs. That the vase itself is porcelain, will hardly be imagined by any one who has seen it; as it is too truly vitreous and transparent to admit of that idea.

The ground, or body, is a transparent blue glafs, so deep in colour, that when looked down upon, or viewed by reflection, it appears black and opake. The raised figures are of a white glafs, so far transparent, that the blue colour of the ground is seen through the thin parts of it, while the thick parts have sufficient opacity to conceal entirely the colour of the ground, and appear of a pure white.

From a careful examination both of the ground and the bas reliefs, and attention to some circumstances which do not seem hitherto to have been noticed, it appears clearly to me, that the body of the vase was coated all over, as far as the bas reliefs were intended to reach, with the white glafs, (which must have been done while the vessel was red hot, or of a sufficient degree of heat and softness for the two glasses to unite;) and that the figures were afterwards produced in this coat, by cutting it down to the blue ground in the manner of real cameos.

One circumstance in particular, which favours this idea, is, that a stratum of the white glafs is to be seen in a part where I cannot otherwise account for it, but where it necessarily would be left in this mode of formation. When the workman had formed the vase, with the white coat upon it, he had the handles to apply, which could be fixed only in the same red hot state. Now in the upper part, where no bas reliefs were intended, and of course no coat laid on, they are united immediately to the blue ground: but the parts, where the lower ends of the handles were to be fixed, being previously covered with the white coat, which, in that red-hot state, he had no means of removing out of the way, he was obliged to apply them *over* it; so that, between the lower ends of the handles and the body of the vase, there remains a stratum of white

glass; and this being about the thickness of the most prominent parts of the white bas reliefs, appears to me a strong presumption that it was originally a continuation of the same stratum. It cannot be supposed that this was done intentionally, by way of ornament; for the artist has made no use of it in that view, and, as it now stands, it is evidently a blemish, by detaching the blue handles from the blue body of the vase at one end, while they are united at the other end as they ought to have been at both.

In the delicate operation of cutting the bas reliefs, the artist has availed himself of an advantage, which this mode of working, and the nature of his materials, happily put into his hands. To the exquisite beauty of the sculpture, he has thus been enabled to superadd the effect of light and shade, by cutting down the parts to greater or less thinness, according as the shade was required to be deeper or lighter, that is, the blue underneath to be more or less visible through the semitransparent white relief. The gradation of shade, which give so much beauty and delicacy to the figures, were, thus, fully at his command: he could vary or deepen them at pleasure, in any particular part, by repeating the touches of his tool, seeing and examining his work at every stroke as he proceeded, till he had brought the whole to be exactly conformable to his own taste and wishes. The like effect is observable in the antique cameos, which were executed in the same manner; nor do I know of any other principle on which it could be produced in the present instance. But the expence of working so large a vase in this manner would necessarily be so great; so much time, labour, and address, would be required for the production of a single piece; that I fear no modern artist, however capable of the execution, would engage in it.

II. *Explications of the bas reliefs.*

COUNT Girolamo Tezi (*a*), in introducing this vase to the notice of the public, gives it as his "conjecture, that it was originally made for receiving the ashes of the emperor Alexander Severus, who (he says) will live in the memory of men on account of this very urn, as the figures on one side of it represent his birth. For what else does the winged boy with the quiver signify, but the genius of connubial love? What the woman, cherishing a dragon in her bosom, but Mammæa, the mother of Severus, who, the day before she was delivered of him, dreamed that she brought forth a purple dragon? What the old man looking at the woman and serpent, but Time, under whose reign, as it were, all things originate? What the grave and comely youth who supports the woman's arm with his hand, but Alexander the great, as if assisting her in her labour? for it was in his temple that Mammæa was delivered of Severus, who always, for that reason, rendered divine honours to him. What the small laurel shrub, and the adult Persian (peach) tree, but a circumstance which happened in the house of Severus, that a laurel, which sprung up on the day of his birth, outstripped in tallness, within a year, an old peach tree that was near it? which was reckoned an omen that the Persians would be conquered by him."

Tezi,
1642.

"The other face of the vase (continues the author) does it not represent the death of Severus? and does not the proximity of the two compartments point out clearly the

(*a*) *Aedes Barberinæ*, p. 27.

T*aci.* shortness of the interval between the commencement and termination of life? For on the same piece of turned work, on which we have just seen the mother bringing forth, we now see another woman lying upon sarcophagi, from whose right hand falls a bundle of torches just extinguished: on one side of her is an elderly man with the staff of a spear in his hand, and on the other side a younger man, looking at each other; the former seeming to represent the Roman empire in the time of Severus, and the latter the emperor himself. Next to these figures, on both sides, [viz. at the bottom of the handles,] appear as it were two faces of masks, of a melancholy and sorrowful aspect. There are also three fig trees, distinguished by the name of *Alexandrine*, which, a little before Severus's death, were suddenly and portentously torn up, not by human force, but by a whirlwind, near his tent. We see likewise, as if struck on a medal [on the bottom of the vase] the effigy of a philosopher, who, by his hand brought towards his mouth, enjoins silence, and admonishes the spectator not to disturb that rest which the manes of the deceased were superstitiously believed to enjoy. But I would rather imagine (he continues) the artist meant to express the wise man's mouth *not shut* by his finger, but that, though a friend to silence, he was reciting the praises due to so excellent a prince, his achievements, his virtues, and his moderation of mind in all things." The count adds, from Lampridius's history of the life of this emperor, many particular circumstances which might have been the subjects of the philosopher's elogium.

BARTOLI has given prints (*a*) (although, as will appear hereafter, not very correct,) both of the vase and the sarcophagus; and likewise a section of the Monte del grano, with the sepulchral chamber.

On the *cover* of the sarcophagus are a male and female figure of the natural size, supposed by this author to represent Alexander Severus and his mother Mammæa; this, he says, was the opinion generally received in his time, and it was from the resemblance of these figures that the sepulchre was believed to have been theirs.

The *sides* of the sarcophagus are ornamented with groups of figures, which Bartoli refers to different circumstances in the life and fortunes of Severus. As these figures have no relation to those upon the vase, it will be unnecessary to enter into the particular explications that have been given of them. I shall only observe in general, that they seem to be most commonly understood as representations of some well-known subjects from Homer; that they are said to be exceedingly well executed; those upon three of the sides in alto relievo, and those upon the other, which was next to the wall, more flat (*b*).

Though Bartoli explains all these figures as applying in *particular* to Alexander Severus and his mother, he gives only a *general* explication of those on the vase. He says, "There are various trees on it; and two heads hang from the handles, by which it is divided into two representations. The one is of a woman lying upon stones, seemingly sepulchral; who is looked at, on one side, by a woman sitting, with a rod or scepter in her hand, perhaps Proserpine; and on the other side, by a man sitting, perhaps Pluto. The other representation is of Proserpine, with the serpent in her bosom."

Bartoli
1697.

THIS last figure, of the woman with the serpent, seems to be the prominent feature that has engaged the first attention of all who have endeavoured to explain these bas

(a) V. Venuti Osserv. sopra l'urna d'Aless. Severo.

reliefs. Montfaucon (*a*), deceived, probably, by the inaccuracy of the copies, or an indistinct view of the original, takes it for Leda with the swan. “The history, or fable, (he says) represented upon the vase, is mysterious. We see upon it Leda with the swan, and Jupiter in his proper figure before her: a Cupid, holding a bow, flies over Leda, and a young man pulls her by the hand. It is not easy to discover what the other figures are doing, nor what relation there is between this fable and the ashes of Alexander Severus. Perhaps it is best to say, that the first precious vessel which came to hand was made use of for this purpose. On the outside of the bottom of the vase is the figure of a man with a Phrygian bonnet, laying his finger on his mouth in the manner of Harpocrates.”

Montfaucon, 1722.

THE idea of Leda with the *swan* would naturally be renounced on a distinct view of the original, or of a correct copy; for the long neck, and the head, mistaken for those of a swan, belong plainly to an animal of the serpent kind. De la Chauffe says (*b*) it was the common opinion in his time that this figure represents “the congress of Jupiter Ammon with Olympias the mother of Alexander the great. That queen sits on the anterior part of the vase, embracing the dragon in her bosom, and stretches out her hand, to a young man, perhaps the Genius: Cupid, carrying a roll in his right hand, and a bow in his left, flutters over Olympias; and an old man stands by, supposed to represent Ammon in his proper form.” Of the figures on the other side of the vase, this author gives no explication. Of that on the bottom he says “it is the effigies of a young person, with a Parthian cap, as Atys is commonly represented.”

De la
Chaufse,
1746.

(*a*) Antiq. expliquées, tom. v. p. 56.

(*b*) Romanum Museum, tom. i. p. 42, tab. 60.

COUNT Caylus, whom we cannot suppose to have been ignorant of the preceding explications, was probably dissatisfied with them; for he says (*a*), “no one has been able to explain [meaning, I suppose, in a manner satisfactory to him,] the subjects which make the ornaments of the vase.” He admits, or rather simply says, without supposing it questionable, that the sepulchre was that of Alexander Severus.

Caylus,
1756.

VENUTI, about the same time, published at Rome an explication of the sarcophagus, already quoted, in which he endeavours to prove that it was not the urn of Alexander Severus, and that the figures upon it have no relation to that emperor. He observes, that Severus died under the age of 30, whilst this effigy represents a person of more advanced age; and that the head dress of the woman, attentively considered, shews little or no resemblance to that of Julia Mammæa. The woman has a crown in her hand which appears to be of laurel, and which had been considered as an argument in favour of the common opinion, but he remarks, that if the crown had been meant as an emblem of empire, it would have been on the *head* of the *man*, and not in the *hand* of the *woman*: he therefore concludes that it is merely a funereal ornament, as the Romans were accustomed to adorn the bodies of their deceased friends with crowns and flowers.

As the figures on the sarcophagus, according to this writer, represent the commencement and termination of the Trojan war, he supposes those on the vase to represent the story from which it originated, viz. the Judgment of Paris, in a manner somewhat different from the common.

“The young man on one side, standing before a portico, is Paris, naked according to the usage of heroes, with a small battoon (this writer says) in his hand; the laurel tree

Venuti
1756.

(*a*) Recueil d'Antiq. tom. ii. p. 302.

Venuti. at his side denotes either the woods of mount Ida, or contest, with victory and the crown."

"The woman sitting on the ground, whom this young man takes by the hand, is Discord; who, as if thrown out from heaven, sits upon the earth, cherishing in her bosom the serpent which others have consigned to her hands or her hair."

"The majestic old man, who listens to the woman as she speaks, has the appearance of Jupiter; and the tree behind him, resembling an oak, the proper tree of Jupiter, is an additional motive for believing this figure to be him. It was Jupiter who appointed Paris to be judge of the goddesses; and on a marble in the villa Medici we see him giving orders to Mercury for that purpose. The attitude of setting one foot on a stone, and laying the elbow on the knee, supporting the head, was given by the ancients to figures supposed to stand with attention, listening to, or observing the proceedings of another."

"It is not a common thing to see Paris naked when judging of the three goddesses; though on an Etruscan patera, and some other Etruscan monuments relative to the Trojan war, he is represented in that state."

"There is another remarkable circumstance in this representation, viz, the portico or building which the young man comes out from, and which can denote nothing else but his departure from his habitation, in order to proceed to the place of decision. And in fact the Love in the air flying before him with a bow, and looking at him, points towards the goddess his mother: in some other ancient representations of this subject, Love is seen likewise pointing to Venus."

"The three goddesses are on the other side of the vase, sitting upon rocks, which represent Ida. The first, as being the best attired, superior to the others, and with a scepter or regal spear in her hand, is Juno. The second, sitting lower, seeming to cover her face in modest attitude, is Minerva;

Minerva; the kindled torch in her hand indicating her Venuti. martial spirit, and the tree close by her being the olive, her proper distinctive. Minerva is indeed rarely found sitting, in monuments that represent the judgment of Paris; though Begerus gives us all the three goddesses sitting, and entirely clothed—On medals they are frequently observed to sit;—and Pausanias, commending Endeus, scholar of Dedalus, says, he sculptured Minerva sitting. The third goddess, likewise sitting, elevated, with a wanton air,—has a little cup or conch (this writer says) for her distinctive, and is near to a pilaster, or column, indicating defiance and contest, as we see frequently expressed in the agonistic games and other victories. Who would not say that this is a representation of Venus, the conqueror of the other goddesses in beauty? They are here represented naked, but in the Brandenburg museum all three are clothed.”

“ This conjecture is confirmed (continues the author) by the figure of Paris on the bottom of the vase, with the Phrygian cap and habit, in the attitude of meditating, as not having yet decided whom he should give the apple to. This position of the hand was appropriated to the silent and thoughtful; as we see in the figures of the goddess Augerona and the god Harpocrates, who were destined to preside over silence. The artist has here repeated the figure of Paris, probably because he had represented those on the vase naked, in the heroic stile; for, as some doubt might thence have arisen with respect to the identity of the person, he was desirous of making the whole clear, and exhibiting his effigy afresh, in half figure, that no ambiguity might remain. The tree behind him was put for no other motive, than to express the woods of Ida, and still more fully to characterise the shepherd, the judge of the grand dispute.”

WINKELMANN espouses the same opinion with Venuti, in regard to the sepulchre, and on the same grounds.

Winckel-
mann,
1767.

1768.

grounds. In the first edition of his History of the art among the ancients (*a*), he does not mention this subject at all; but in the supplemental observations (*b*) he says, "From the so called sepulchral urn of the emperor Alexander Severus in the Capitol, no conclusion can be drawn respecting the art in his time; for the two figures on the cover cannot be those of that emperor and his mother, as the male figure represents a man of considerable age, whereas Severus died before thirty." In the second edition (*c*) he adds, that; "the female figure, whose resemblance to Mammæa has given rise to the false denomination of this monument, is indisputably the portrait of a *wife* at the side of her *husband*."

"The figures therefore (he continues) on the vase that was inclosed in this sarcophagus, instead of being considered as having an allusion to the name of Alexander Severus, may be applied to the conception of Alexander the great. — But according to all appearances, the subject here represented is the fable of Thetis, who was metamorphosed into a serpent to elude the pursuits of her lover Peleus. The same subject is represented on the coffin of Cypselus, where the young Thetis, with a serpent in her hand, is endeavouring to frighten away Peleus who is ready to embrace her" (*d*). The author is entirely silent with respect to the other figures, and says only that "this is not the place to enter into an explanation at length."

(*a*) Geschichte der kunst des alterthums, *Dresd.* 1764.

(*b*) Anmerckungen, &c. 1767.

(*c*) Histoire de l' art de l' antiquité, *liv.* 6. *chap.* 8. — The original was not published till 1776, though the copy, as Huber, the French translator, informs us, was in the bookseller's hands eight years before, and I have dated Winckelmann's opinion accordingly. The French translation is in 1786.

(*d*) Pausanias, *lib.* 3.

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THE arguments of the two preceding writers against the urn's being that of Severus, are endeavoured to be invalidated by Foggini, (a) from a careful inspection of the urn itself in the Capitol. "I well know, says this author, Foggini,
1782. that the resemblance of the male figure on the cover with the medals of Severus, is a matter of fact, as any one may be convinced by comparing the medals with the marble itself, and not with the prints of it; for these are very far from being true, and particularly that published by Santi Bartoli, which, besides, represents the whole urn reversed. The celebrated Mr. Bartolemi, keeper of his Most Christian Majesty's cabinet of medals, being at that time, in 1756, at Rome, compared the marble, and was satisfied of the resemblance, as is attested by Piranesi, who was along with him on that occasion. The objection drawn by Venuti from the age at which Alexander was killed, is likewise done away by inspection of the marble, which represents such a man as Alexander is described by the author of his elogium, to have been, *his make of body was such, that besides a graceful mien, and the comeliness which we still see in his portraits and statues, he was of a military stature, and military strength.* The marble shews also that the woman is of greater age than the man, though this does not appear in the prints."

"And further, Fabretti, (b) having observed that the Monte del Grano is situated not far from the ruins of the aquæduct made by Severus, and that from thence the whole prospect may be seen, from the source of the water to its termination, is led to conjecture, that the senate might have determined to erect there a mausoleum to that prince, in memory of his having been the author of this grand aquæduct. It is likewise to be observed, that in this part of the campagna Romana, Julia Mammæa had her de-

(a) Museo Capitolino, tom. iv. p. 2.

(b) De aquis & aquæductibus veteris Romæ.

Foggini. lightful villa, as appears indubitably from the leaden pipes found by Ficoroni (*a*) in the vicinage of Lugnano, with the inscription IVLIA MAMMAEA AVG; which pipes were presented by Ficoroni to the museum Kirkerianum. To this may be added, that if the mausoleum erected by the senate to Alexander Severus, is not the above-mentioned ruinous fabric called Monte del Grano, not the least knowledge now remains where it could have been; although the description, given of it by the author of his elogium, affords reason to believe it to have been such a building, that some vestiges of it must have been left; he was honoured, says the historian, with a *cenotaph in Gaul, and a most ample sepulchre at Rome*. Upon the whole, it is possible, that the ancient and common opinion of this urn having contained the ashes of Alexander Severus and his mother Mammæa, may not be true; but it is certain, that no one has hitherto demonstrated it to be false. On the supposition of its being true, the laurel crown in the hand of Mammæa, and not upon the head of Alexander, may perhaps be a symbol of the authority which she always had in the government of her son, who, according to the historian above mentioned, *transacted all things by the advice of his mother, and was assassinated along with her.*"

THIS work (*Museo Capitol.*) contains prints of the figures on the sarcophagus as taken from the original in the Capitol. To these, and the explications here given of them, I would refer those readers who may be desirous of any further information in this respect. With regard to the vase, a sketch of which is prefixed as a vignette, the author thinks it most probable, from the considerations above mentioned, "that the ashes of Alexander Severus were deposited in it, and that the sculptures it is ornamented

(*a*) *Memorie del Labico*, p. 44.

with relate to that emperor." In the explication of one ^{Foggi} compartment, supposed to represent the birth of Severus, he agrees in every particular with count Tezi, whose hypothesis has been already stated; some of the figures in the other compartment he explains a little differently (*a*).

"On the other side of the vase (he observes) representing the death of Severus, we need not wonder that the artist has made his mother Mammæa the principal figure, as it was she who regulated the affairs of the empire, and nothing of importance was undertaken without her counsel and approbation. The figure of the young man, sitting as it were at the feet of Mammæa, may reasonably be supposed to express Alexander Severus. Perhaps the sepulchral mausoleum was erected by the Romans conjointly to both, and the ashes of both deposited in the same sarcophagus; as on the cover of the sarcophagus in which the vase was found, they are represented together, sculptured in alto relievo, Mammæa holding the first place. It is more difficult to conjecture who is represented by the figure that stands behind Mammæa, leaning the left hand on a spear. Count Tezi says it expresses a man of an advanced age, and takes it to be a symbolical representation of the Roman empire; but in the print given by De la Chauffe it appears rather to be a woman. I have not been able to see the original; but if it corresponds with this print, I should think we might suspect that such a figure represented Britannia, where Alexander Severus and Julia Mammæa were killed by the rebellious soldiers."

"On the bottom of the vase is a half figure, clothed in the manner of the barbarian women, standing in the attitude of pressing one hand to the face. De la Chauffe says only that it has a resemblance to Atys; Tezi, that it expresses a philosopher, enjoining silence to the passengers,

(*a*) Museo Capitolino, tom. iv. p. 402.

Faggini. that they may not disturb the rest of the emperor buried there, or rather reflecting upon the virtues which the emperor was adorned with. I cannot concur in either of these opinions, but think it more probable that the artist meant to express the druid priestess, who, while Severus was preparing for his expedition against the Britanni, gave him this forewarning, *Go, but neither expect victory, nor trust thy soldiers.*"

THE first attempt I know of, made in *this kingdom*, for explaining these bas reliefs, was in a learned paper by Mr. Marsh, communicated to the Society of Antiquaries in 1784 (a). He conceives them to "contain scattered features of well-known history (b), satyrically sketched out. Though there are but few figures, there is much invention; and if conjecture may be allowed, I should believe that two scenes, as it were, are exhibited to the eye, and held up for contemplation; though, perhaps, my hypothesis may seem to rest upon supports too slender. I wish the smallest ornaments, growing up from the thing itself, to be first adverted to; the column, the architecture, the branches, whether of laurel, or olive, or peach, the torch inverted, the tablet, and, lastly, the winged boy, and the serpent. Weigh each particular, as placed in its peculiar situation; and observe also the masks by which these scenes are separated. (Of the figure on the bottom of the vase, as being of quite different workmanship, and supplied from elsewhere (c), it is not necessary to speak.) In all these, what else will you find but short notes and portions of true history, which, if not altogether concealed, you will perceive to be not easily recognised on the first view. You will discover, that a Marius,

(a) Archæologia, vol. viii. (published in 1787) page 316.

(b) Lampridius, Alex. Sever. 24, 25.

(c) On the authority of Sir W. Hamilton.

or an Archilocus (*a*), contends with a Lampridius, or that Mr. Marshall. satire sports with history."

"We had lately among ourselves an artist very fit for such a work; Hogarth, universally lamented (*b*). If he had united with some satirical writer, and undertaken, in one small tablet, to lash a luxurious emperor, addicted to the most shameful vices, and to praise a virtuous one; prescribing to himself at the same time such simplicity, that the whole story should be comprized in six or seven figures drawn to the life; I say, if this had been the object proposed, I do not know that he would have painted it otherwise; for after the disposition, the parts, and the result, had been well conceived, such, perhaps, would have been the traits of the picture."

"On a throne, as it were, exalted above the rest, the square column of empire being placed at his back, sits Heliogabalus, with his garment loose, in attitude slothful, obscene, and libidinous. At his feet, female or connubial love lies sorrowful, holding in her languid hand a torch just not extinct. We read of Augusta Paula (*c*), a most beautiful woman, rejected and repudiated by that monster of impurity; and we know the causes of the repudiation (*d*). The person on the throne looks contemptuously at the woman, with a countenance at once intent and threatening. On the right hand of the woman is a female monitor, divination, revolving many things in her mind, fixed in purpose, leaning firmly, perhaps, on an augural lituus, just going to give a response to the tyrant, or, like another Syrian priestess, ready to denounce his death (*e*).

(*a*) Spartian. Heliogab. 11, 30.

(*b*) He died in the year 1764.

(*c*) Herodian. lib. v. c. 14.

(*d*) Dio Cass. penultimo.

(*e*) Spartian. Heliogab. 33.

Mr. Marsh. Above the woman, reclined between them, you see a tree over-hanging and split asunder. Recall to mind the words of the historian, *he would not be called great, he would not be called Antoninus* (a). Who? Severus. What Severus? Alexander,—the distributor of oil, an enemy to effeminacy and smoke-selling, attached to dreams and divination. But in the middle you see a branch rising up vigorous by itself like a new stock. *Marcellus thou shalt be*, said the Prænestine fortilege (b), a race and name principally claimed and acknowledged from the family of the Marciani; *if thou canst break through the harsh decrees of fate*, if thou canst escape the snares now laid for thee by the emperor. I shall pass over the connubial tablet, at the feet of the reclined woman, sealed and untouched, or the writing of divorce made with Paula, and proceed to greater objects in the other compartment of the vase.”

“ Under the Doric cornice of a column, simple and venerable, is introduced a young man; tall, naked from the palæstra, of an athletic body, comely, and of a graceful mien (c), on whom a matron softly lays her hand. Let us remember the dreams of Alexander’s parents, and first of his mother, Mammæa, that she was about to bring forth a dragon (d). But the birth happened at the town of Arcena, in the very temple of Alexander the great (e). Afterwards his father had a dream, that he was carried up to heaven on the wings of victory (f). We see here a winged boy, whether victory or love, with a torch and quiver, exulting in success, and flying into the sky. Another omen also happened, respecting our Alexander: for a laurel tree,

(a) Lamprid. Alex. Sever. 5, 6—11.

(b) Id. 4.

(c) Id. 4.

(d) Id. 14.

(e) Id. 5.

(f) Id. 14.

says Lampridius(a), which sprung up near a peach, within Mr. Marsh. a year outstripped the peach. We may see the smaller tree, and understand the prediction of the aruspices: *the Persians are to be conquered*, they said——After so many things, so well and so happily executed, the woman, Mammæa, as if just delivered of her child, is beheld attentively, with a grave and auspicious, not to say heavenly, countenance, by a figure more than human, probably Jupiter; under the patronage of whom, as the genius of the Alexanders, all these things were brought about: nor is the present scene without some allusion to that in which the sovereign of emperors and of the gods was fabled to have conversed with Olympia. But who can pass the temple unnoticed? that most ornamented place, in which these sacred mysteries occur, which seems of itself pretty clearly to intimate and point out the encouragement and patronage of Alexander Severus, by which many works of Grecian architecture were rebuilt, and those which had been begun by others were, during the short period of his reign, most elegantly finished. I acknowledge myself to be struck likewise by the exquisite contrast of the figures on both sides, and the accurate opposition by which they illustrate one another, when I compare the events of the preceding times with those of Alexander's. To these last, if I mistake not, belong the temple, the young man coming from the exercise of laudable arts, the care expressed by his mother, Mammæa, for his education, who is attended by love, joyful, looking back at her, and passing to heaven; the fixed attention and good will of Jupiter. To the former belong the throne of empire, the effeminate emperor, the woman flighted and forsaken, and, lastly, the very expressive female minister of religion or divination."

(a) Lamprid. Alex. Sever. 13.

Mr. Marth. "But to conclude the whole explication in a few words; let the vase be called a votive urn, made in honour of Alexander Severus, in the year of Rome 975."

"As Heliogabalus, from luxury and hatred to women, was unwilling to have sons (*a*) for heirs or successors; there is born of, and educated by, Mammæa as another Olympia (*b*), under the auspices of the propitious genius of Rome or of Jupiter supreme, another Alexander, rival of heroes, patron of the Grecian arts, the emperor Severus."

ANONYM. THE anonymous writer already mentioned, in the General Advertiser, after observing that "the obscurity of this bas relief has induced many to suppose it bears no relation to established history, or known mythology,"—adds, "yet this opinion is controverted by the sentiments of a learned antiquary of our own nation."—and gives an abstract of that antiquary's "remarks on this mysterious subject, in the hope he may be tempted to publish them hereafter, with the whole accompaniment of erudition." It is the preceding paper (which was not then published) that this writer appears to have had in view; but he has stated an idea, respecting the trees, which does not appear in the original. In the first compartment, where he supposes Heliogabalus to be represented, he says, "The Persia or peach tree, an emblem of the unconquered state of Persia, is blooming near him; but the laurel, a symbol of victory, seems mutilated and decayed." And, in the other compartment, where the virtuous Severus is exhibited, "the peach tree is lopped and withered, while the laurel flourishes."—He varies also a little in the idea of the winged boy; making him have a reference rather to Severus him-

(*a*) Spartian. Heliogab. 31.

(*b*) Lamprid. Alex. Sever. 13.

self than to his mother: "Love or victory (he says) for *Anonym.* they are alike the reward of valour, is seen flying before him, and inviting him to follow."

"But all this (continues the anonymous writer) though confessedly learned and ingenious, is but mere conjecture; and a very strong circumstance militates against its probability. No workmanship, so exquisitely perfect, can be supposed to have been produced after the expiration of the arts, which were languishing even at the commencement of the Augustan æra."

"Neither is it certain that the object of our enquiries ever contained the ashes of Severus and Mammæa. The heads on this vase, as well as those on the tomb in which it was found, have not the least resemblance to the personages already spoken of, and with their faces every collector of Roman coins is sufficiently acquainted.—And yet, if their remains were once inclosed in this matchless vessel, we may reasonably enough imagine (though its sculpture has no relation to their fortunes,) that after the emperor and his mother were killed, and their bodies burnt with the customary honours, their friends appropriated the most valuable urn they met with, to the reception of their kindred ashes. Severus was a known encourager of the *vitriarii*, and was himself no mean proficient in the arts of painting and statuary. He may therefore be supposed, at the time of his death, to have had specimens of the most beautiful Greek workmanship, like the vase before us, in his possession."

MR. D' HANCARVILLE has entered into minute ^{D'Hancar-} disquisitions on this vase in every point of view, and ^{ville,} ^{1785.} treated the subject with a profusion of erudition (*a*). But as his account, if copied at full length, would swell this

(*a*) Recherches sur l'origine, &c. des arts de la Grece, tom. 2.

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little pamphlet beyond its intended bulk, I shall endeavour to contract it into a smaller compass, without omitting any thing that appears material to the explication of the subject.

He urges the arguments of Venuti and Winckelmann against the tomb being that of Alexander Severus, with some circumstances which give them additional force. It had no inscription, as those of the emperors had; nor could it, compared with those whose remains are still to be seen at Rome, be called *vast* or *most ample*, as that of Alexander Severus is said by Lampridius to have been. The female figure on the cover of the sarcophagus he acknowledges to be Mammæa: but the male figure, being older than she, not less than 55, could not have been meant for her son, who died at the age of 26 years, 5 months, and 19 days. As the two figures are in the position which husband and wife used to be placed in when the ashes of both were deposited in the same urn, he contends that the figure in question represents the father of Alexander Severus, who was Mammæa's second husband; and that its resemblance to Alexander in features arose only from the son having been like the father.

With regard to the vase, he observes that the bas reliefs upon it, executed with all the delicacy of the most beautiful antique cameos, were, like them, wrought by the lathe; and that the elegance of the design, the exquisite choice of the proportions, and the noble simplicity of the attitudes, point out, to the least intelligent eye, the best time of the arts in Greece:—that this time did not exist in the reign of Alexander the great, as some have supposed; for though Lysippus was indisputably the greatest sculptor of that age, it appears from Pliny that his works were not equal to those of Phidias, and that Polycletus, contemporary with Phidias, carried sculpture to its highest point of perfection. It is therefore to the time in which these last-mentioned artists lived, prior to that of Alexander

under the great, that he refers the execution of the vase. D'Hancarville.

He argues likewise, at considerable length, that the idea of its representing the story of Jupiter with Olympia, and of its being the work of Alexander's reign, instead of mutually confirming one another, as they have been supposed to do, are really incompatible: for that the story was not believed, nor were divine honours paid to Alexander by the Grecians, till long after his death, when the Macedonians, distressed by the incursions of the Gauls, and discontented with the conduct of their then king Ptolemy, begun to invoke the manes of Alexander and Philip as gods. Philip, who had been wounded in the left eye by an arrow from the enemy, as recorded by Plutarch, was then feigned to have lost that eye as a punishment for his curiosity in looking, through a slit in a door, at the mystery between Jupiter and his wife: such a story could not have gained cred't during the short reign of Alexander, which scarcely amounted to twelve years, and in which the true source of Philip's injury must have been in every ones recollection.

The bottom of the vase is not of one piece with the body, but cemented to it; and from this circumstance Mr. D'Hancarville concludes, that the original intention of the vase was to receive the ashes of the dead; for by being made in two pieces, it would admit the introduction of the larger remains of bones, which could not enter at the narrow neck. The different stile and workmanship of the figure on the bottom from those on the body of the vase, has raised some suspicion of its being by another hand: but he observes that this figure is only a sketch, and that we nevertheless perceive in it the ideas of a great master; that the figure cannot be better disposed, more graceful, or designed with greater simplicity; that the same kind of flat relief is employed in the figures on the frieze of the parthenon at Athens, which was executed under the direction of Phidias himself, and of which some pieces still exist, in the collection

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collection of Sir Joseph Banks; and that in the figure on the bottom of this vase, as well as those on that frieze, the artist had very obvious reasons for neglecting that kind of beauty which arises from the elevation of the relief; for in the one case, a high relief would have shaded, or concealed from the eye, some of the parts behind; and in the other, it would have prevented the vase from standing steady on its bottom.

As the vase was designed, according to him, for containing the ashes of the dead, it is natural to believe that the subjects it is ornamented with may have some relation to that destination. The figure on the bottom (commonly called a Harpocrates) he considers as a key to the rest; as being peculiarly characteristic of Orpheus, the institutor of the mysterious worship of the subterranean deities, in which silence was enjoined, who is said (*a*) to have written on the manner of obtaining the peace of the gods, and on the gifts made to the dead, and who recommended to the Greeks to deposit precious things in their tombs. Though the doctrine of the infernal regions was written on tables at Delos long before the time of Orpheus, yet Orpheus wrote upon the same subject, and, like Swedenborg in our own time, pretended to have seen and heard what passed there: this was the origin of the fable of his descending into the regions of the dead for the recovery of Eurydice. In the tablet of these regions, painted at Delphos by Polygnotus, towards the time of Phidias, Orpheus is represented leaning against a tree, holding in one hand his lyre, and in the other branches of willow, (the wood of Proserpine) habited like a Greek, without either the dress or the cap of the Thracians which are usually given him: here he has the Thracian habit, without the lyre, and rests against a fig tree, which Homer places in the dominions of Pluto with the olive (*b*).

(*a*) Argonaut. vers. 39.

(*b*) Odyss. xi. 589.

Both these trees are represented in the bas reliefs on the body of the vase; they appear barren and without fruit, to denote the sterility of these regions. D'Hancarville.

Under a fig tree, which scarcely bears a few leaves, is seen a figure, whose strength of limbs, and largeness of muscles, denote a being far more powerful than the others: one of his legs is sunk in the earth, by which single circumstance he is known to be Pluto. The apparent incorrectness of making one leg shorter than the other, far from being, as it has been supposed to be, a fault in the design, is a mark of the ability of the artist, who thereby meant to characterise the god of the manes, the lord of the soil, to whom altars were raised, and sacrifices offered, in trenches dug on purpose. This deity is known also by his hair, covering, and advancing upon, his forehead, and which is always thus disposed in the figures of Serapis, who is the same as Pluto. In a very fine head of that god, in Mr. Townley's collection, the visage appears sunk under the hair, which gives him a dark and sombrous aspect; while the hair drawn back on the front of Jupiter communicates that air of sweetness and majesty so magnificently characterised in Homer by the motion of his hair making vast Olympus to tremble.—All the sculptors studied to express this sublime image: the simple elevation of the hair of Jupiter was sufficient to make his heads known, as the depression of the hair distinguished Pluto's, or the rams horns those of Jupiter Ammon.

Pluto has one of his arms passed behind his back, as if he had just been inflicting some punishment: the other arm rests upon his elevated knee, and his chin is supported on his hand, as if he was meditating, or waiting the issue of some event. His countenance is severe and menacing, and expresses strongly *the tremendous king, whose heart is not to be softened by human prayers (b).*

(a) Virgil. Georg. iv.

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(a) Virgil. Georg. iv.

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ville.

Opposite to him is one of the gates of the house of Pluto, for Homer reckons several. Here we see those steps, so easy of descent, but so difficult to be re-ascended (*a*), which are also characteristic of the mansion of Pluto. We see Orpheus just arrived at this fatal bourne; his robe touches, and spreads upon, the stones; he is ready to clear them, one of his feet is close to them, and the other, which is advanced, shews that he has just turned himself. Contrary to the injunction of Proserpine, he has looked at Eurydice, who is constrained to turn her back, but holds out one arm to him, and he endeavours in vain to retain her; the aquatic serpent, from whom she received her mortal wound, distinguishable by his crest, is at her side, and seems raising himself up to give her a second death: she is fixed to the ground as a poet quoted by Pausanias represents Theseus and Pyrithous to be, not by chains, but by their bodies adhering to the spot where they were placed. Pluto looks upon her sternly, and seems to enjoy the complaints of Orpheus. Love, who had conducted him in his journey, and accompanied him thus far in his return, now forsakes him and turns back, seeming to illuminate the dismal wood with his torch.

This wood, extending equally on both sides of the vase, convinces us that the artist meant to represent the infernal dominion in all its parts. Homer speaks of the wood of Proserpine in the plural number, to express its divisions. One of these divisions is here marked by a square pilaster; and these sorts of pilasters, square or cylindrical, are seen frequently upon vases painted with the figures of the Dioscuri [Castor and Pollux]: there is one upon the reverse of a medal of Dioscurias (a city of Colchis, which bears their name, and where they were particularly worshipped,) with bands alternately black and white, to shew their alternate life and death.

(*a*) Virgil *Æneid.* vi.

At the side of the pilaster, which serves to mark the division above-mentioned, and which is known to be one of the symbols of the Dioscuri, the artist has placed the Dioscurus who was then among the dead, seated in a majestic attitude, answerable to the title of king, under which, according to Plutarch, they were worshipped in Lacedæmon. This attitude, which, in the the figures of Jupiter, indicates the king of the gods, distinguishes the Dioscurus here represented to be Pollux, the son of Jupiter; for Castor was the son of Tyndarus, and in that quality mortal; it was in virtue of the friendship of Pollux, that the immortality, which he held from his father, was divided between them.

Pollux, now in the regions of the dead, must be interested there for the persons he had known upon earth; and we see he is so, in this bas relief, for Orpheus, who was one of his companions in the Argonautic expedition, and whose descent into Pluto's dominions was one of the most remarkable events of their time.

Another event of the same time, not less celebrated, is the magnanimity of Alcestes, the daughter of Pelias, which makes the subject of another part of this bas relief. That princess, like Orpheus, descended among the dead out of conjugal love; like Pollux, she gave up half of her life in friendship to her husband, Admetus. Pollux, connected on earth with Admetus, who was one of the Argonauts, turns towards, and seems to admire, his wife Alcestes here: she appears extended upon a rock, in a posture nearly similar to that in which the figures of the dead are represented on their sarcophagi, with the infernal olive tree behind her: she holds a torch inverted, the symbol of death; while the flame that begins to be rekindled from it is an emblem of the restoration of life. As she is the only woman to whom that happened, it is she alone that can be here represented. Near it is a square stone, with an opening in the middle: this kind of stone usually covered cinerary vases, and libations were poured in at the opening; and the derangement

D'Hancar-
ville,

of this stone shews that Alcestes, whose ashes it covered, is going to quit the habitations of the dead. One of her arms is placed upon her head; this is the attitude of the Philefian gods, which, in all ancient monuments, marks love or friendship, and here denotes the singular attachment of Alcestes to her husband. The attitude of the Dioscurus, who turns towards her, is a mark of the knowledge they had of one another upon earth: thus Polygnatus, in his tablet of the infernal mansions (as Pausanias tells us) represents Jafius as recognising Phocus by means of a ring he had given him; and as in that tablet many figures appear seated upon rocks, so almost all those of this bas relief sit on stones, which are well suited to characterise both the place where they are, and the scene of which they had made a part.

Near Alcestes, we see Tyro; the first of the figures in the bas relief; and who is also the first person mentioned by Ulysses (except Anticlea, his own mother) in Homer's description of *hades*. Tyro, one of the most illustrious princesses of Greece, daughter of Salmoneus, and wife of Creteus, is called by the poet *queen of women*; and therefore she here carries a scepter. She turns her head towards Alcestes, her daughter; for being represented as preceding in order of time, she is therefore looking at some one who was to come after her.

The composition of this bas relief (continues the author) is conducted with such intelligence, that there is not a form in the figures, not one attitude, not one character, which does not serve to develop the intention of the artist; not even a single accessory, that does not contribute to illustrate the subject, and recal to mind some testimony of the ancient poets, on which we may build for explaining it, as Pausanias did in explaining the tablets of Delphos. By the correspondence of the ideas employed in its compositions, with those expressed in Virgil, we discover the common sources from which those ideas were drawn both by the artist and by the poet, and how well acquainted the latter

latter was with the ancient Greek authors whom we have now lost. D'Hancarville.

He observes that the simplicity of the contours of the figures on this vase, the little movement that is given to the lines of which their cheeks are formed, and the height of the relief, are the same as on the medals of Gelon and Hiero, the first kings of Syracuse; and that the hair is also touched in the same manner. He shews, by a chain of circumstances collected from ancient authors, that it was in their time that the toreutic art was invented or new-modelled by Phidias, and perfected by Polycletus;—so that the execution of the figures, and the invention or perfection of the instrument by which alone they could be executed, coincide in one period, which appears to be about five centuries before the commencement of our æra:—that Polygnotus who painted the tablet of Delphos, and the poet Simonides who composed the inscription upon it, were of the same age;—that the subject of that tablet was the same as of this vase, and the figures in both treated in the taste which at that period reigned in Greece. The arts were then in their most flourishing state: in the following times, they lost of their dignity; they became more elaborate, but could not preserve the majestic simplicity which appears in this work.

This vase, destined to receive the ashes of the dead, and incontestably made in Greece, was doubtless originally deposited there in a sepulchre, and afterwards taken from thence and transported to Italy. The author enquires into the period at which this removal probably took place, and shews that it could not have been earlier than the 166th year before the Christian æra, in which year Paulus Æmilius shewed to the Romans the first statues brought from Greece, which he had obtained by the conquest of Pella, the capital of Macedonia. The Romans, before that time, made little enquiry for monuments of the fine arts, but were become very fond of them when Julius Cæsar sent

sent the colony that repeopled Corinth, which had been destroyed 102 years before him. It was these new colonists who opened, and dug into, the tombs of that city; not with a view to employ the stones in building, as had been done by Themistocles; nor to break and demolish every thing, as in the war made against the Athenians by Philip, the son of Demetrius; but to preserve for sale, the precious things they should discover there. They found vases of clay, which sold at Rome as high as those of Corinthian brass, whose value is known to have been great. These vases were called *necro-Corinthian*, or *mortuary* Corinthian vases; and the author thinks it most probable that the present vase was one of this class; that it was brought to Rome towards the time of Augustus, and that, after being preserved there for more than two ages, it was restored to its original destination, by being inclosed in the tomb of a very important personage, of Genesius Marcianus, allied to several emperors, the husband of Julia Mammæa, the father of one of the best princes who had ever governed the Roman empire.

THE Gottingen Review, in giving an account of Mr. D'Hancarville's work, calls this explication the "most forced and improbable that could ever have been invented." In the opinion of the reviewer, "the subject represented upon the vase still remains unintelligible. Exquisite as the performance is, it is nevertheless a fault of the artist not to have duly characterised the action. We are inclined to doubt (continues the writer) whether he meant to represent any connected story or fable: it is probably a mere picturesque representation of certain single and well-known characters.—Had Mr. D'H. thought of the fable of Proserpine, visited by Jupiter in the shape of a dragon,—her lover Adonis, and her husband Pluto, on each side, and farther on Ceres,—this would have had some probability." —The reviewer does not seem to mean that there is any one

one connected fable, consisting of all these personages together, (for neither my own researches, nor those of my learned friends, have been able to discover any such,) but that the artist has composed his groupe from separate fables or persons, agreeably to the opinion he had intimated above.

THE latest account that has come to my knowledge is a paper by John Glen King, D. D. read to the Society of Antiquaries, Nov. 30, 1786 (a). This learned writer, taking it for granted that the vase was discovered in the tomb of Alexander Severus, is thence led to conclude that it belonged to him, or to his mother; and that it is the urn of Mammæa, representing her death, and the birth of her son.

Dr. King,
1786.

He premises some considerations, which are applicable to the preceding explications as well as his own, and which tend to remove one obvious objection to them. "Though the ancient artists often grouped figures to represent some historical fact, or poetical fable, yet they frequently did not attend to perspective, nor endeavour to attain it, and disregarded the unity of action, time, and place." In confirmation of this, he gives a quotation from Mr. Falconet *, pointing out the ridiculous circumstances in two or three of the well-known ancient performances. "In one, Ceres is represented with a torch in her hand, seeking her daughter Proserpine, whom, at two steps distance, Pluto is carrying off, and going to place in his little car, conducted by Mercury; the horses are already on a full gallop, though this commodius carriage is still empty; and they are hurrying the equipage through the infernal

(a) Archæologia, vol. viii. p. 307.

* Notes on his translation of the 34th, 35th, and 36th, books of Pliny's Natural History, treating particularly on the fine arts.—This translation was printed at the Hague in 1773, in two volumes 8vo., but is extremely scarce.

Dr. King. regions, where Pluto, seated on his throne, a few inches distant, complains, as they say, to Mercury, that he is the only god who is unmarried. Nymphs, Naiads, Minerva, Diana, Venus, are not omitted: and it is curious to see them all jumbled together to add still more to the incoherence of the composition; for they all stand on the same plan. This piece is in the Mazarini palace at Rome."

"In another bas relief (continues Mr. Falconet) you see Minerva ordering Perseus to deliver Andromeda: and at the other end of the piece, you see Perseus again in the act of delivering her: in the middle between these two Perseus's you may have the pleasure of seeing the birth of Venus rising out of the sea: her bosom and her size shew her to be full grown, but gods and goddesses come into the world ready dressed. Two Tritons carry the mother of the loves on a shell, as the Roman soldiers carried the emperor on a shield: a very ingenious idea to express the empire of Venus in the universe; but two Cupids, much larger than their mother, finish and spoil the whole; each of them riding very commodiously on the tail of a Triton. These three subjects, Perseus going to deliver Andromeda, Venus carried on a conch, and Perseus actually delivering Andromeda, are likewise on the same plan or ground, and all the figures touch. This work is in the palace Mattei."

Dr. King applies these remarks to the vase in question; which he finds to have all the beauties and defects so frequently united in the works of the ancient artists. "We have certainly (he observes) two distinct stories. In one there seems an allusion to the birth of Alexander the great, under which is typified the birth of Alexander Severus. Jupiter, whose figure cannot be doubted of, is represented contemplating the charms of Olympias; and at the same time you see the figure of a serpent, or dragon, with Olympias, under which form Jupiter is fabled to have begotten Alexander the great; his passion for her is represented by the little Cupid holding his bow, flying over the female figure

figure reclined on the ground, which is probably intended to Dr. King represent Mammæa delivered of her son, standing by her as a full grown figure, and holding her hand: for the artist endeavours to exhibit two different periods of time at the same instant, the birth of the emperor, intimated perhaps by the mantle in his hand, and his state of manhood."

"The writer of the life of Alexander Severus (*a*) (continues the Dr.) will furnish many instances to corroborate this conjecture. The day of his birth was the same with the day of the death of Alexander the great, in whose temple his mother was delivered of him, and whose name therefore he took from thence: his nurse was of the name of Olympias, and the mother of Alexander the great was of the same; his foster-father was of the name of Philip, and the father of Alexander the great was the same. We are told also of his attachment to the name of Alexander; when the Senate, on his accession to the empire, intreated him to assume the name of Antoninus, he persisted in refusing it against all their importunity, as he did in refusing the title of *great*, which they would have added to Alexander. We may hence, however, fairly infer, that the poets and artists of those days would avail themselves of this topic of praise in their flatteries to him. And such seems to be intended in this bas relief: the scene of the temple is marked by the architecture behind the figure of Alexander, though his head, through the errors in perspective, is as high as the column of the temple. In the background, if there be any distinction of ground, are two trees, probably alluding to a circumstance mentioned among the omens of Alexander's future reign: a laurel in his father's garden, which was set by the side of a peach (Persian tree) in one year had overtopped the peach, which was taken for an omen that he should one day conquer the

(*a*) Lampridius, Hist. August. Scriptores.

Dr. King. Persians. One of these trees has the laurel leaf, and has the appearance of being much more flourishing than the other, which is almost a naked trunk."

The Doctor observes, that "the artist most undoubtedly had some meaning, well understood in his days; but that many of the faults and absurdities in the execution, such as want of unity of time, and want of perspective, will remain the same, whatever his meaning was; and therefore ought not to be objected to the explication here given."

"The other tablet (he thinks) is more consistent as to time, if it represents the death of Mammæa, signified by the expiring torch which the female figure reclined holds in her hand. He is at a loss to divine what she, or either of the other figures in this compartment, are placed upon, but thinks the artist might have some meaning even in that, as a hewn stone seems falling at the feet of the middle figure. The man sitting at her feet, and holding a mantle, seems to be the emperor her son; for we see the laurel tree again behind them, one of the branches now withered; the building on which he sits, for such it seems to be, may represent a bath, the baths he built being reckoned among his most magnificent works: they were of porphyry and Lacedæmonian marble, and are preserved on one of his coins. The beautiful figure on the other side leaning on a *hasta pura* or staff of a spear, seems an allegorical figure, perhaps to represent constancy, though I have no similar representation of that virtue to adduce. She seems seated on an artificial rock, and I took my idea from the firmness visible in the whole form, and the vigour of the arm pressed on the stone upon which she sits: it called to my memory Milton's description of the confidence virtue inspires,"

"——— Yes, and keep it still.

Lean on it safely———

——— This I hold firm,

Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt.

——— If this fail,

The pillar'd firmament is rottenness;

And earth's base built on stubble. *Comus.*"

"As

“ As to the figure at the bottom of the vase, in the Phry- Dr. King.
gian cap, which somewhat resembles Harpocrates, I shall only observe, that it appears of different work from the sides; it is evidently on a larger scale, and is not of one piece with the rest of the urn, but fastened to it with a cement, as any one may discern by examining the original; it seems also to have been a piece of a larger work.”

“ According to Lampridius, Alexander and his mother were murdered, at the same time, by the machinations of Maximinus. They were, however, afterwards universally lamented by the soldiers, by the senate, and by the people; they were both deified, and had a magnificent sepulchre at Rome; in which, as has been said, this vase was found. The work on it is a proof of the abilities of the artists of that time, as are also the coins of the reign of that emperor, which are very fine. It is certain, he was well educated and accomplished; and being himself a judge in painting, sculpture, and architecture, he was most probably a great encourager of the arts; for this reason, I should not give this piece a higher antiquity than his reign.”

“ If the conjecture here advanced be right as to this being the urn of Mammæa, it may farther be considered as very obvious, that the birth of her son, from whom she derived the splendor of her life, should be represented on it, as the glory of his reign was so much owing to her. She preserved him from the attempts of Heliogabalus to destroy him, and brought him up with the greatest care, engaging such persons only to instruct him as were distinguished by their probity as well as learning; not allowing any one to come near him, who had been connected with his debauched predecessor, or whom she suspected capable of corrupting his morals.”

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